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ABSTRACT

Periods of executive change provide an ideal time for the development of planning efforts for public school systems and for self-examination of the system's strengths, weaknesses, and long-range needs. In the anonymous school system under study, the new superintendent's application of general systems theory to school district management entailed a model of five overlapping workgroups, including such relations as board of education/superintendent and superintendent/central administrative staff, as well as a five-step problem-solving cycle for realizing objectives: (1) analysis of existing conditions, (2) diagnosis, (3) prescription, (4) program implementation, and (5) evaluation. A three-step procedure was initiated to move the district toward outcome-based management. In phase 1, individual and small group interviews with community representatives validated preplanning issues raised by the board of education. Phase 2 involved all school administrators in the design of formal work plans dealing with such issues as organizational relations and comprehensive planning. Organizational planning has since become an integral part of the school system's management. Although the greater involvement of teachers and staff projected by phase 3 is still in the early stages, the model has already improved communication and focused the school system on assessment and improvement rather than maintaining the status quo. (JBM)

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ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

A Paper Presented At

The Annual Meeting

of

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

October 1981

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A primary responsibility of any executive officer -- be it the president of a private sector company or the chief administrator of a public sector institution -- is organizational development. A review of the literature related to the theory and practice of administration reveals what a high priority that behavorial scientists have placed on this particular executive function. The research clearly indicates the strong link that exists between organizational vitality and organizational development. The data seems to suggest that a well conceived program of organizational development is an integral part of any successful institution. Therefore, it is important that the chief executive officer be attentive to this particular function, and that he/she design a plan that will make organizational development a continuous process.

The intent of this paper is to review those factors that must be taken into consideration in establishing a state of readiness for organizational development, and to suggest a specific intervention strategy to initiate such a program. For our purposes, organizational development is defined as a rational, well-thought-out procedure for determining organizational objectives, (short and long range), and the identification and implementation of strategies to achieve those objectives. In essence, it represents an effort to bring about meaningful change within an organization through long range planning. It is based on the assumption that no organizational form is perfect -- that every organizational form has different sets of consequences and that the set of consequences that can best survive in a given environment guides the selection of the organizational form.

This definition and assumption suggest the need for pre-planning activities that will enable the chief executive to analyze the existing status of the organization. A period of diagnosis

is necessary in which answers are sought to such questions as:

1. What is the status of the work flow?
2. What is the quality of the relationship between work groups?
3. What is the quality of the relationship between individuals within work groups?
4. What are the formal and informal communication links? Can the information flow be tracked?
5. Are there any unique factors (environmental variables) which impact on organizational operations?

If this analysis reveals any serious problems, they need to be addressed prior to the initiation of a long range planning effort. Once a state of readiness has been established, the chief executive officer can proceed with the planning effort.

There are situations which present themselves in school systems or other organizations that make for an ideal time for intervention and the initiation of a long range planning effort. One such time occurs when an organization is searching for a new chief executive officer. This opportunity presented itself to the authors, and the remainder of this paper will be devoted to a description of the intervention strategies utilized during a period of executive change to develop a long range planning effort for a public school system.

Whenever a school system is faced with the task of selecting a new chief school officer, it is an ideal time for the policymakers (Board of Education) to conduct some type of organizational self-analysis. Such a self-examination should focus on school system strengths, weaknesses, and long range needs. This study can be helpful to the Board of Education in developing criteria to be used in the selection of the new Superintendent, and

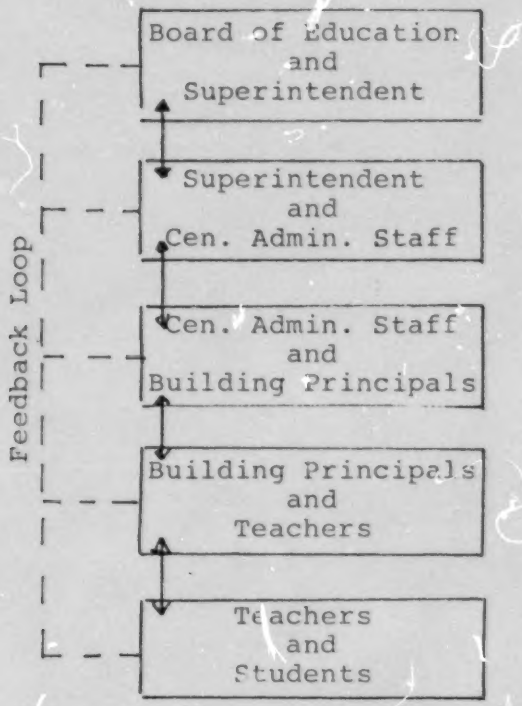
it can also serve as a stimulant for long range planning once the Chief School Officer has assumed the new position. In the opinion of the authors, school systems should engage an outside process consultant to assist with this exercise and with the executive search process. Outside consultants possess the objectivity and facilitation skills necessary to carry-out these tasks, and school systems are not likely to find such individuals within their own districts. Such activities did take place in the school system under study and they revealed the Board of Education's desire to engage in a long range planning effort. In essence, planning skill was one of the significant criteria used by the Board in the selection process.

Needless to say, the new Superintendent placed a high priority on educational planning and recognized the impact that environmental variables can have on the planning process. The strategies employed by the new Superintendent not only reflect an effort to make formal planning an integral part of system operations, but also to develop a firm grasp of district demographics (environmental factors), and the impact they might have on the ability to effect any meaningful change within the schools.

The new Superintendent's theoretical base was General Systems Theory as applied to school district management. The general systems model was operationalized through the principle of "Overlapping Work Groups" [1] (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Overlapping Workgroup Model


Board of Education and Superintendent
Superintendent and Cen. Admin. Staff
Cen. Admin. Staff and Building Principals
Building Principals and Teachers
Teachers and Students
Feedback Loop

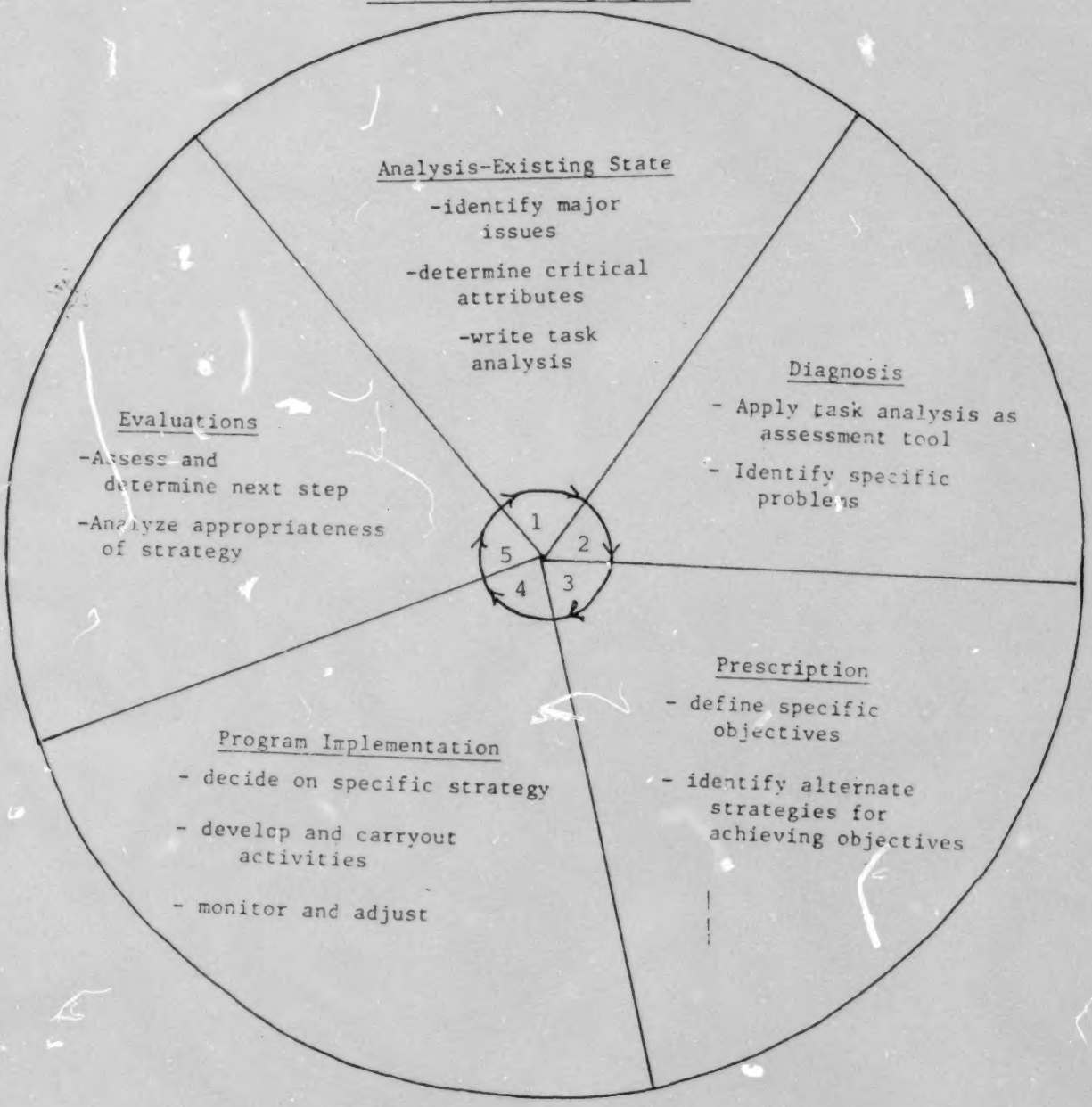
The rectangles represent five different levels of work groups, from a Teacher-Student group where specific programs are delivered in the classroom, to the Board of Education - Superintendent where policy decisions are made with regard to the overall direction of the school system. Each group is perceived as part of a subsystem carrying-out specific responsibilities directed toward the achievement of clearly identified and articulated goals. Each group has a critical linkage figure who serves as the interface and key communicator between work groups as a result of overlapping membership. For example, the Superintendent must be able to clearly articulate the policy desires of the Board of Education to the Administrative Staff so that they can translate them into a program of action for the school system. The feedback loop provides a means of internal communication that enables the various workgroups to have input into decisions made at any level of the organization. The model

is designed to facilitate communication and promote cooperation. This is achieved through the identification of clearly articulated outcomes or expectations for each group. For example, if the Board of Education identifies Mathematics as an important district priority, then, through a program of action, the classroom teacher should be able to identify specific outcomes of the Mathematics program for a given grade level. In addition, they should be able to identify the strategies that they utilize to insure that youngsters achieve those objectives.

In addition to introducing the overlapping work group model, the new Superintendent also worked with each group to implement a five-step problem-solving cycle as a process for translating outcomes or objectives into a plan for action (Figure 2). While there are five clearly defined steps within the cycle, it does

Figure #2

Problem Solving Cycle



focus on the areas of diagnosis (what is the problem), prescription (what are the outcomes and strategies for overcoming the problem), and assessment (how successful were we in dealing with the problem). This organizational process, i.e., problem solving cycle, applied to the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools in formulating guidelines for the operation of the school district (policy), to administrators and teachers in the formulation of a program (curriculum), and to teachers and students as part of the teaching/learning process (instruction).

The commitment to the General Systems Model is reflected in the steps taken by the Superintendent to make formal planning an integral part of the management of the school district. A three-step procedure was initiated to move the district toward outcome-based management. Phase I involved a continuation of the pre-planning activities as outlined at the beginning of this paper, Phase II focused on the implementation of the planning model with the administrative staff, and Phase III will focus on greater involvement of teachers and students to the model.

The pre-planning activities (Phase I), were carried-out in an effort to determine the existing state-of-the-art. This included both an internal and external analysis of "what is". It began with a review of the last five (5) years of the minutes of the Board of Education. This study revealed a detailed narrative describing the district analysis conducted by the Board of Education as part of the Superintendent Selection Process. The Superintendent was able to verify the Board perceptions through a meeting with the Board of Education devoted to developing short and long range priorities for the school district. At this meeting, the Superintendent suggested the need to validate the Board perceptions by seeking input from district residents. This activity set the stage for a community needs assessment which was conducted during the first six months of the new Superintendent's tenure.

The community needs study involved a comprehensive program of interviews rather than the traditional survey instrument. Previous attempts to gather data via a formal questionnaire had resulted in a response rate of only 10% to 12%. Therefore, it was decided individual and small group meetings would provide a broader data base and would be more representative of the thinking of district residents. Included as part of this study were community groups ranging from service clubs to the volunteer fire departments, school-affiliated parent organizations, elected community officials, representatives of the media, and personnel managers from the major employers of the area. The interview instrument was similar to that used by the Board of Education in conducting their analysis of the school district. It included questions in the following categories:

1. Strengths of the School District
2. Weaknesses of the School District
3. Future Directions of the District
   a. Long Range
   b. Short Range

Once this data was collected, collated, and analyzed, it was shared with the Board of Education. Interestingly, the concerns expressed by district residents tended to validate the concerns raised by the Board of Education.

As a final step during the Phase I activities, the Superintendent, working with the Board of Education, carried out two tasks:

1. Revision of School District Goals and Priorities
2. Development of a Work Plan for the Superintendent of Schools which addressed short range (no more than one year), and long range (one to three years) concerns of the Board.

Phase II was initiated at the start of the Superintendent's second year with the school district. It involved expanding

and implementing the planning model with the administrative staff. This process began with a Summer workshop for administrators devoted to organizational planning. It involved a review of the activities that occurred during the previous year, a discussion dealing with the systems model previously described, and the involvement of all administrators in the design of formal work plans. The design of the work plans included the following:

1. Revision and update of job descriptions to insure internal consistency with Board of Education expectations.
2. A task analysis defining specific job duties within each area of the job description.
3. A breakdown of tasks into maintenance and dynamic or change items.
4. A determination of the total amount of time that would be devoted to each task area.
5. A method of measuring the dynamic or change items.

Figure 3 provides a sample of the final document as developed by each administrator. The categories were based on the job description and included the following:

1. Organizational Relations
2. Community - Public Relations
3. Staff Personnel Management
4. Business and Fiscal Management
5. Facilities Management
6. Curriculum and Instructional Management
7. Management of Student Services
8. Comprehensive Planning
9. Professional and Personnel Development

Figure 3 - Workplan

Title: Superintendent of Schools

Reports to: Board of Education

Task: Organizational Relations (28%)

Description: To serve as Chief Executive Officer of the School District and to monitor the activities of the administration to insure the efficient operation of staff and facilities to meet student educational needs as identified by the school district priorities.

Maintenance Objectives	Dynamic Objectives	% of Time	Evaluation
1. prepa[re] board agenda and reso[lu]tions		1. 6%	
2. prepares and/or schedules all reports for the Board		2. 1%	
3. responds to requests from the Board with regard to inquiries on all phases of the program.		3. 2%	
4. coordinate and schedule all meetings of Bd. sub-committees		4. 5%	
5. meet with the President of the Bd. of Ed. on a bi-weekly basis to review agenda and discuss district concerns		5. 1%	
6. interpret and update the policies of the Board and translate into program of action.	6.1. The Superintendent will coordinate the revision of the school district policy manual and administrative regulations	6. 8%	6. 90% of the annual decisions of the Bd. of Ed. and the Admin. will be consistent with the policies of the district
	6.2 The Sup't. will conduct an inservice program to familiarize administration and Bd. of Ed. with revised policy manual.		6.1.1. Revised policy manual presented by the Bd. of Ed. by June 1983.
			6.1.2 100% of Adm. and members of the Bd. of Ed. will accept revised policy manual by August 1983.
7. serve as leader of the Admin. Team and chair meetings of the Adm. Council		7. 5%	

Each administrator agreed that they had responsibilities in these nine categories. Internal consistency was achieved by building the job descriptions and work plans around these nine areas. Variance occurs in both documents however, because of differences in job responsibilities.

Once the plans were developed and approved, they served as a guide for administrative activity during the ensuing school year. The process was monitored by the Superintendent by means of bi-weekly meetings with administrators on an individual basis. Modification in outcomes could be made on or before completion of the first semester. At the end of the school year, the workplan became the basis for evaluating administrative effectiveness and determining changes in the compensation structure for the following school year.

It should also be noted that the problem solving cycle as cited in Figure 2 was started again at the outset of the second year. The Superintendent was evaluated by the Board of Education based on his workplan. As an outgrowth of that process, district priorities were restated and a new workplan developed. The administrative staff went through the same process with the Superintendent, and a summer workshop was conducted for the purpose of revising and updating workplans. Organizational planning has become an integral part of the management of this school system. It is recognized as a cyclical and continuous process that will facilitate the achievement of organizational goals.

Phase III will focus on involving teachers and student in the model. Some preliminary steps have been taken in this direction with the design of a job description for teachers, and a revision of the teacher evaluation process. The new supervisory approach involves a clinical model consistent with the problem solving procedures outlined in Figure 2.

The implementation of a formal planning model has had a positive impact on this district. It has tended to improve communication between the various sub-groups of the organization in that outcomes are clearly articulated and defined. In addition, it has caused the organization to focus on an accepted set of pricrities rather than have sub-groups respond to individuals having needs and concerns. Furthermore, the outcome-based management model tends to focus on assessment and improvement. Thus, the total organization tends to be dynamic and forward-looking with individual sub-groups striving for organization improvement rather than maintaining the status-quo.

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